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太田紫織

Prologue

I was born in the city I died in. For better or worse, it goes at its own pace, and in this city that hates change, the flow of time remains tranquil. One can call it “peaceful.” Unchanging, it’s not that it can’t change, but rather I don’t think it wants to change in the first place. It has the toughness and straightness of a thigh bone but, as the city lies unchanging, it feels as if the people’s hearts have just stopped. I like this city. However, this feeling of suffocation and stagnation felt as if it’s going to stop my breath. All up until I met “that girl.”

In this city, there is a plethora of old shrines. Such as Nagayame Shrine, Daitou Temple, Tennei Temple and Myouzen Temple. The city has remains of ancient trees that once dominated the landscape, maple, ash, japanese elm, but now, only a few remain here and there. I had thrown a sideways glance to a building from the reclamation era. That was the building I had once hurried to.

When I walk through the ancient city, it isn’t long before a thick green enters my vision. There was a maple tree, a little under 150 years old. Next to it stood a japanese elm of similar age, and in the spring you can see splendid cherry blossoms in full bloom. As if all the trees were to just be packed away, a white mansion had appeared. From the damage of the building, you can easily see that at least 100 years had passed since construction. It’s basic motif is wooden, colonial style to be precise. The lining of the white trees contrasts the black framework of the house. With just one glance, it’s clear that the house was made with elaborate design in mind. The window protruding from the outward of the wall is impressive. Decorating the entrance is a stained glass window with round diamonds, rubies, pearls, silvers, agate, crystal, coral and lapis lazuli all piled onto the front. Similar buildings of the time are befitting of the modern era. The building gives off an atmosphere of the open sea and peace. Even though it’s damaged in many places, it’s feels as if it’s a miracle this mansion even exists.

Even though the trees seem to flood the area, no one can resist looking at the blinding white. With the owner of this mansion in sight, “Looks like it’s a certain somebody.” We said in unison. Both of us equally uncomfortable. I saw before me a dangerous beauty.

Crossing under an arch of entangled vines in between the gap of the dandelion and stitchweed, a stone cold face appears facing the side of the garden. If you were to look from the outside, this is a beautiful garden, but the upkeep on the garden doesn’t appear to be very well maintained, and the center of the garden is a jumbled up mess. When I continue onward into this garden with spider nests hanging from the tree branches, in an area with just a perfect gap in between the perfectly aged trees where the green shadows do not cover, I find *her* standing there. She is wearing a white shirt reflecting the dazzling sunlight.

She faces her back to me, she appears to not have noticed me, but rather the roots of the cherry blossom tree. She’s a bit tall compared to other women, prideful and a firm posture. In addition to all of that, even though she’s just standing there, she demands attention. While still looking away, she says, “Hello.” Up to when she had noticed me, I think I had been staring at

her butt for a little while. I'm an impatient person, so in the end I couldn't hold my tongue and ended up saying something.

"Yo, you ended up coming here? Aren't you a bit late?"

After I said that, she tilted her head towards me, cracked a smile and started laughing, so I thought she was glad to hear my voice. Maybe this smile meant she would lead with something like "You're like the sun," or maybe "You remind me of blooming flowers." I learned the meaning of this smile, this smile that shines like the sun, this smile that reminds me of blooming flowers, this pretty, innocent, smile that shows she has no care in the world. The innocence of it is cute. It's absolutely more dazzling than the summer sun.

Since she is a rather lady-like figure, I didn't run up to her, instead she tapped her foot lightly on the floor creating an impatient tapping sound. I look like a child that has showed up empty handed to a guest's house. Therefore, I quickly rushed over. It's always me that approaches her.

"I'm sorry for making you wait."

"It's fine, beside that, boy, there's something I want you to help me with."

"Something you want me to help you with?"

"I can't really explain it well"

With saying that, her jaw had raised and she pointed to a spot on the ground. The place she's pointing has a deep red liquid dripping out from a gauze bag resting upon the roots of the cherry blossom tree. The bag looks like something is in it.

"This is..."

When I stepped into the vicinity of the bag, the overwhelming smell of the bag had caused me to turn away. The strong smell of blood has overtaken the corpse. In other words, the body is decaying. I have seen something like this before, so I'm used to it.

"Sakurako-san, could that possibly be..."

"Isn't it amazing? Now, please help me."

Before I could say anything, Sakurako-san had taken my hands then spread them apart and once again, burst out laughing. As always, her laugh is amazing. I don't like being in this kind of situation, but seeing her smile is worth it. So once again, I helped her out.

Bone One - Beautiful Person

That day, as usual I said, "Stop by on the way home." Being Sakurako-san, she arbitrarily sent me an email with unspeakable demons, so I stopped by her old western-style house after school. No matter how many times I reread the email, it is just as it's written, no other meaning. I can't contact her any other way. It's always like that.

Why? Rather, how come? Well, if I were to not send a reply by mail like usual, and instead were to confront her directly with a phone call, she would yell, "I'm busy right now!" So since I got the email, I have to hurry to her side. I can reject her and not come, but when I think of what would happen after I do that, I get scared, so it's best if I just go. So even today I said, "Could you please at least write the reason you want me to come?" But as always, she brushed me off and ignored whatever I said. Well, even this is what always happens. This is a so-called "template." If I were to say what I truly thought, even though I have, her selfishness gets in the way, so we have both agreed to just give up trying to break this template.

The place where we live is known as Asahikawa. Even though we're in northern Japan, next to Sendai, we're the core city with the third largest population, and before World War II, we were a big, developing military town. The big attraction of the town is the Asahikawa Mountain Zoo. Thanks to that, throughout all of Hokkaido, we have the second highest tourist count, but until we hit number one, we're just another city. Even if we were to gather up all the tourists, we don't match the glamor of other major Japanese cities. Maybe it's because we get a lot of earthquakes, since we're surrounded on all sides by mountains. Thanks to Biei's Stations and the wooden buildings, there's still buildings from the reclamation period here and there. Although in addition, we don't match the gaudy buildings of other cities, or the massive structures of others. That is the state of this city. If a building is to suffer damages, we just replace it with another of the same. Everywhere in this city, there are signs of deterioration and congestion causing a dull atmosphere to float throughout the city. There aren't many people that try to change that, they just look at the various tourist attractions over and over. Even when the city finally gets it act together and continues the development of the downtown area, that can't even clear this dreary atmosphere. Probably because everyone cherishes the tree stumps that lay around the town. The people of Asahikawa, by nature, hate change.

Even though that's how this place is, it still boasts incredibly rich history. According to the old housekeeper, "When you get cold, then the draft wind must be quite tired huh?" ...Hey. In that old western styled house, Kujou Sakurako-san spent a lot of time with her. So that's what an ojousama is. She looks to be in her 20s, late 20s. Always wearing a dress shirt and jeans. I wonder if she ever wears anything else. Her outfits make her look like the type to never crack a joke. Though, you can tell how she feels by the look in her eyes. She's a tall beauty, and her sense of style is also nice. Speaking of height, shockingly enough, despite me being quite tall, our waists are at the same height. Her hair, always slightly frizzy hair, goes down to her shoulders, and it's still its natural color, black. Because of who she is, there's no way she'd get a perm or anything like that. Maybe her hair has been messy since birth. It's not like she has to do anything in particular, if you look at her just as she is, you can see her splendor...That's just the

kind of person Sakurako-san is. Although, she has changed quite a lot lately. First of all, she doesn't like humans all that much. Well, that's not completely right, it's more like she has no confidence in the human race. By her nature, she has no interest in things like that. So because of that, she doesn't even have the necessary, essential, tool of communication in the modern age, a cellphone. The things she likes are, firstly, bones. Secondly, bones. Thirdly, bones. Fourthly, bones...and fifthly, bones. Oh, she likes bones. It doesn't matter the type of bone. She loves every single living beings' bones, and she cherishes them dearly.

Her grandfather is a forensics professor, and he taught her, well, he waved his pointer around and used force, brought in tons of different animal corpses from various places for Sakurako-san to examine their skeletons, gave her presents, added various bones to his own collection and sold them online.

In the area where the splendid architecture of the house had expanded into, there lay buried a countless amount of dead animal bodies. Before, when I smelled cooking meat from the kitchen, I thought "They must've found some roadkill raccoon. Must've taken the bones too," and that she must be happily cooking up the food in a big pot. Normally, when you boil stuff like this, the smell is horrible, and the housekeeper hated it, but then I heard she started adding soy sauce, causing the smell to disappear. The bigger things and the decomposing things, for those they made a garden to keep away from Sakurako-san. That is, they used strong industrial strength gas burners to boil them. Those things were outside her interests.

When power is put into her hands, she'll just become a demon that wants to find an animal and strip it down to its white, dried up bones. Then she'll carefully collect every single last fragment she can, and then using resin or glue, she'll put it back together. All to make them look pretty in a glass case. Rather than any kind of living, moving being, she locks away things of that nature behind glass. And from the bottom of her heart, she loves people that speaks plainly. This, this is the eccentric person that I had met at that case, but that's a story for another time. But in the end, ever since I met her, I have been following her.

"So, what shall we do today?"

The neighborhood's children parents said that there was a monster around (maybe they were a bit shocked by the rumors?) After the old housemaid met them at the door, as always, I lead them into the living room full of Asahikawa designer furniture (we're a town famed for our furniture.) Sakurako-san sat in her original recliner, crossed her legs and asked questions. In her modern design chair, in this western styled house with a historical feeling, the mood is slightly different, but I understand she likes that chair.